

ABSTRACT OF THE INVENTION

A vending machine system and its associated method of operation. In the vending machine system, customers are provided with identification cards having statistical information regarding the identity of the card owner. Also contained on the card is a digital data code corresponding to a biometric characteristic of the card owner. Vending machines are provided that contain card readers and biometric characteristic scanners. When a customer wants to use the vending machine, that customer inserts their identification card into the vending machine. That customer also subjects themselves to a biometric scan from the biometric characteristic verifier contained within the vending machine. The vending machine reads both the identification data and the biometric characteristic data from the card. A systems processor in the vending machine compares the biometric characteristic data on the identification card with the biometric characteristic data just gathered.